DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 218 675 CS 207 123

AUTHOR Click, J. W.; And Others
TITLE Reader Response to Front Pages with Modular Format and Color [and] Newspaper Errors: Source Perception, Reporter Response and Some Causes. American Newspaper Publishers Association (ANPA) News Research Report No. 35.
INSTITUTION American Newspaper Publishers Association, Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE 29 Jul 82
NOTE 13p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Error Patterns; *Layout (Publications); *Media Research; *Newspapers; *News Reporting; Perception
IDENTIFIERS *Reader Response

ABSTRACT

Two studies were conducted, the first to determine reader response to newspaper front pages with modular format and color, and the second to examine source perception and reporter response to errors in news stories. Results of the first study revealed that respondents in three cities preferred modular front pages to other modern format pages and that they preferred pages with either spot color or four-color halftones to pages without color. The second study revealed that reporters disputed three-fourths of news source claims of error, but did admit that 20% of their stories contained mistakes. It showed also that sources felt there were more errors in longer stories, those with multiple sources, and those about local government, and that organizational constraints appeared to minimize error by reducing opportunities for reporters to write stories that are error-prone. (FL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

American Newspaper Publishers Association

ANPA NEWS RESEARCH REPORT

FROM THE ANPA NEWS RESEARCH CENTER No. 35 July 29, 1982

A REPORT FOR EDITORS PROVIDED IN COORDINATION WITH THE NEWSPAPER READERSHIP COUNCIL

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

American Newspaper Publishers Assoc.

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

ROUTE TO:
Editorial _____
Promotion _____
Circulation _____
Advertising _____
Production _____
Personnel _____
Other _____

ED218675

Reader Response to Front Pages with Modular Format and Color

By J. W. Click and Guido H. Stempel III

HIGHLIGHTS: Respondents in three cities prefer modular pages to other modern format pages and prefer pages with either spot color or four-color halftones to pages without color.

Newspaper Errors: Source Perception, Reporter Response and Some Causes

By William A. Tillinghast

HIGHLIGHTS: This accuracy study of the San Jose Mercury and San Jose News found that reporters dispute three-fourths of news source claims of error, but do admit that 20 percent of their stories contain mistakes. Sources feel that more errors are in longer stories, those with multiple sources, and those about local government. Less-experienced reporters do not make more errors, but less-experienced sources perceive more errors. Organizational constraints appear to minimize error by reducing the opportunity for reporters to write stories that are error-prone.

Copyright © 1982 American Newspaper Publishers Association

American Newspaper Publishers Association
The Newspaper Center, Box 17407, Dulles International Airport, Washington, D.C. 20041
William C. Marcil, Chairman and President Jerry W. Friedheim, Executive Vice President
Maxwell E. McCombs, Director, ANPA News Research Center

CS 207 123

Reader Response to Front Pages with Modular Format and Color

By J. W. Click and Guido H. Stempel III

J. W. Click is professor of journalism and Guido H. Stempel III is director of the Bush Research Endowment at the Ohio University School of Journalism.
This study was funded by the ANPA News Research Center.

Continuing a 14-year examination of the innovative trends in newspaper front-page formats, this study finds that readers prefer modular pages and pages with color.

Our first study in 1968 dealt with reader evaluation of balance, contrast and balance, brace, horizontal and six-column formats.[1] We found a preference for horizontal pages, but an indication that horizontal pages might be viewed as sensational and thus irresponsible. With many newspapers moving to modern, horizontal formats in the early 70s, the sensationalism question seemed critical. It became the focus of our second study[2] which compared reader response to three modern, horizontal pages and three traditional pages. There was overwhelming preference for modern pages over traditional pages, and no indication that newspapers with modern format might be perceived as sensational. Our third study compared response to pages with and without four-color halftones.[3] Pages with four-color halftones were clearly preferred.

Further developments in the evolution of front-page layout led to this study. Our 1979 study of the rate of adoption of format suggested that there are two developments that bear exploration.[4] We found that the use of spot color—tint blocks and borders—is much more widespread than the use of four-color halftones. It is evident that many newspapers which have the technical capability to use four-color halftones are not using them.

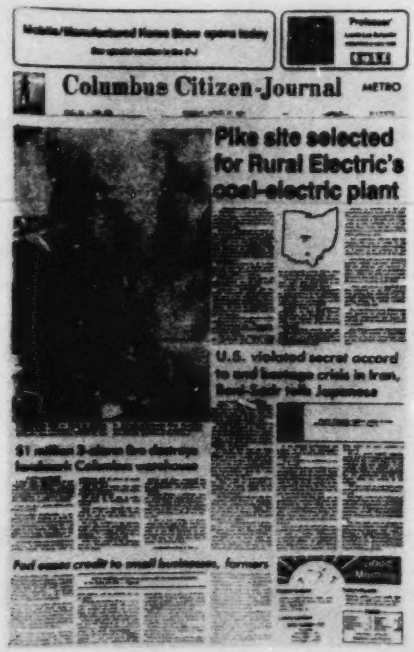
We also noted in our rate-of-adoption study that there is significant movement toward modular pages, a graphic form different from other modern formats. It probably has both advantages and disadvantages. In particular, there is reason to ask what the effect of the extreme rectangularity of these pages is.

These two observations lead to the research questions of this report:

1. Do readers prefer front pages with *spot color* such as tint blocks or borders to similar pages with no color at all?
2. Do readers prefer *modular forms* to less rectangular types of modern format and to traditional format in front pages?

Method

We selected front pages demonstrating the formats and characteristics in question and asked respondents to rate them, using a set of 20 semantic



Modular Page with Four-Color Halftone (Picture of fire is four color)

Modular Page with Spot Color (Spot color used in "The Budget Dollar" illustration)

Modular Page without Color

differential scales validated for use in rating newspapers. Previous research found that the scales formed these five factors:

Evaluative: Pleasant-unpleasant, valuable-worthless, important-unimportant, interesting-boring

Ethical: Fair-unfair, truthful-untruthful, accurate-inaccurate, unbiased-biased, responsible-irresponsible

Stylistic: Exciting-dull, fresh-stale, easy-difficult, neat-messy, colorful-colorless

Potency: Bold-timid, powerful-weak, loud-soft

Activity: Tense-relaxed, active-passive, modern-old-fashioned

Respondents were shown a slide of each page for 15 seconds and then asked to rate that page using the 20 scales. The order in which the slides were presented was rotated to eliminate any effect of the order of presentation.

We made studies in three cities in June and July of 1980. The cities were Akron, Ohio; Hattiesburg, Miss.; and Huntington, W.Va. There were 200 respondents in each city, equally divided between male and female and between under and over 40 years of age. Respondents were members of social, civic and religious groups. Administration of the survey was done in groups. Akron has a population of 232,000, Huntington 65,000 and Hattiesburg 42,000. The variations in size and region were considerations in selection of these cities. Hattiesburg also was included because it had been in our 1973 study and provided a basis for comparison between the two studies.

To achieve the desired variations in the use of color and format we needed seven front pages. Those chosen and the format represented:

The Daily Oklahoman, Oklahoma City—*traditional*

The Pittsburgh Press—*modern, no color*

The Blade, Toledo, Ohio—*modern with spot color*

The Times-Leader, Martins Ferry, Ohio—*modern with four color*

St. Cloud (Minn.) Daily Times—*modular, no color*

The Florida Times-Union, Jacksonville—*modular with spot color*

Columbus (Ohio) Citizen-Journal—*modular with four color*

Results

Our results indicated a preference for modular pages and for pages with color. The two modular pages with color, the Florida Times-Union and the Columbus Citizen-Journal, finished first and second overall in all three cities as Table 1 indicates. Furthermore, they were first and second on a majority of the scales—12 of 20 in Akron, 14 of 20 in Hattiesburg and 18 of 20 in Huntington.

The Times Leader
Powhatan Man Beaten to Death; Pair Jailed
District Shuts Down; Teacher, Board Talks On
Carter Tightens Screws

Modern Page with Four Color Halftone (Picture is four color)

THE BLADE
Bush Upsets Reagan, Kennedy Leads Carter in Pennsylvania Voting
Carter Plan To Register Men For Draft Approved In House

Modern Page with Spot Color (Border under nameplate and border around "Inside" are in color)

The Pittsburgh Press
FINAL
Old Flame That Won't Die Burns Attorney, Wife
Hostage Deal Hinted By U.S.
Soviets Out Of Sight, Not Mind Of Afghans

Modern Page without Color

Table 1

Average Ratings of Newspapers by Respondents in Three Cities

	Daily Oklahoman	Pittsburgh Press	Toledo Blade	Martins Ferry Times-Leader	St. Cloud Daily Times	Florida Times-Union	Columbus Citizen-Journal
Akron	4.13	4.27	4.10	4.75	4.51	4.83	4.97
Hattiesburg	4.27	4.36	4.04	4.59	4.41	5.08	4.98
Huntington	4.35	4.64	4.20	4.59	4.62	5.05	5.01

(7-point scale: low = 1; high = 7)

The preference for modular format also is reflected in the fact that the St. Cloud Daily Times, the modular page with no color, finished fourth in all three cities. In all three cities it was behind The Florida Times-Union and the Columbus Citizen-Journal, both modular newspapers. The Martins Ferry Times-Leader, a modern page with four color, finished ahead of it in Akron and Hattiesburg, while The Pittsburgh Press, a modern page with no color, finished ahead of it in Huntington.

The one result that does not fit neatly into place is that the Toledo Blade, a modern page with spot color, finished last in all three cities. It was not only behind The Pittsburgh Press, a similar page with no color, but also was behind the Daily Oklahoman, a traditional page.

THE DAILY OKLAHOMAN

Army of Lawmen Restores Order in Idabel

Soviets Launch Afghan Airlift

TODAY

Traditional Page

What this may reflect is the obvious possibility that other smaller details may influence the rating in a given instance as much as does overall format. Rather obviously there is more to putting together a page than selecting a format. On some of those details of layout, our respondents found the Blade less appealing than the other newspapers.

Still, what stands out is the clear preference of our respondents for the two modular pages with color. It is possible that the two in combination enhance each other, but at the same time we still feel the findings reflect a preference for modular pages and a preference for color.

Comparative Results

Finally, comparisons with two of our other studies need to be mentioned. In Hattiesburg, the overall ratings are very similar to what they were in 1973. While modular pages were preferred to other modern pages this time, the ratings of the two best modular pages are almost exactly what the ratings of the two top newspapers were in the earlier study. This is subject to varied interpretations, but one thing is clear—the rating of a newspaper will not continue to rise indefinitely as it improves format. Our Hattiesburg respondents preferred modular pages this time. Perhaps in general they will prefer what is newest. Or perhaps the newspaper that is advanced enough in its thinking about design to be using modular format also tends to have better know-how about other aspects of layout.

Our earlier study of the impact of color found no exception such as the Pittsburgh Press was this time. However, a difference in procedure should be pointed out. In that study we used the same newspapers with and without color. Other factors had less opportunity to affect the outcome. Our prediction would be that the Press with color would have higher ratings than the Press without color as it was in this study.

Conclusion

This study, like our previous studies, does find that, in general, the public is receptive to the make-up innovations that have been made by newspapers in the past 15 years. It thus again reaffirms the judgment of newspaper editors and newspaper designers. □

Footnotes

[1]J. W. Click and Guido H. Stempel III, "Reader Response to Newspaper Front Page Format," Journal of Typographic Research, 2:127-142, 1968.

[2]J. W. Click and Guido H. Stempel III, "Reader Response to Modern and Traditional Front Page Make-up," ANPA News Research Bulletin No. 4 (June 3, 1974).

[3]J. W. Click and Guido H. Stempel III, "Reader Response to Front Pages with Four-Color Halftones," Journalism Quarterly, 53:736-38, 1976.

[4]J. W. Click and Guido H. Stempel III, "Rate of Adoption of Modern Format by Daily Newspapers," ANPA News Research Report No. 22 (Sept. 1979).

Newspaper Errors: Source Perception, Reporter Response and Some Causes

By William A. Tillinghast

William A. Tillinghast is an associate professor of journalism at San Jose State University. *This study was funded by the ANPA News Research Center.*

One half of all newspaper articles have mistakes in them—if we take the word of news sources. This error rate has been found by studies which, since the mid-1930s, have asked news sources to evaluate articles which attributed information to them. Two-thirds of source objections are to inaccuracies that researchers term subjective error, alleged mistakes in judgment such as omissions, underemphasis, overemphasis and misquotes. The other third are classified as objective inaccuracies, the errors of fact, spelling, numbers, times, dates and places.

But is the source right all the time? This study on newspaper accuracy sought out the *reporter response* as well as the *source complaint.* It also focused on possible contributions to error from the external environmental constraint of circulation patterns and the organizational constraints of deadlines, story characteristics and level of reportorial experience at the two newspapers involved—the San Jose Mercury and the San Jose News.

Findings in Brief

- About half of all news stories contain mistakes, mostly judgmental errors, according to news sources. But reporters say only 20 percent have mistakes because they dispute at least three-fourths of the source claims, especially the judgmental errors.

- The sources most likely to consider something wrong are the ones with the least contact with the reporter and the media in general.

- The reporters least likely to agree they made a mistake are the younger, less-experienced reporters.

- Mistakes are not more likely to be committed by the younger, less-experienced reporters.

- Surprisingly, stories written on deadline contain fewer mistakes. Lack of time, and circulation patterns, help minimize error by reducing the ability to produce stories that are more likely to be perceived as containing mistakes.

Background

The author spent four weeks in the summer of 1980 observing newsroom activity at the San Jose Mercury and the San Jose News, morning and afternoon Knight-Ridder newspapers, respectively, serving the southern portion of the San Francisco Bay Area. The Mercury's 12-month average paid circulation was 155,472, according to the September 30, 1980 Audit Bureau of Circulations figures. The News' circulation was 67,914. The two newspapers share a common newsroom, printing facilities, Saturday and Sunday editions, photographers and about eight pool reporters who cover the traditional beats—excluding police—such as city and county government, municipal, superior and federal courts, science, environment and investigative, and another 20 area and Statehouse bureau reporters.

More than 99 percent of the News circulation is in the Primary Market Area (Santa Clara County) and six nearby communities. About 93 percent is in the city zone, a metropolitan area with a 1980-estimated population of 1,092,300, two-thirds of whom live in San Jose. The rest reside in seven suburban communities. Another six percent of the circulation is in the remainder of the PMA which includes about 214,800 people in six communities covered by two of the Mercury News regional bureaus. Less than half of one percent of the News circulation is in the six nearby counties covered by the other four bureaus. By contrast, only 79 percent of the Mercury circulation is in the city zone, while 9 percent is in the rest of the PMA and another 12 percent is in the six nearby counties.

The Mercury's regional circulation requires it to operate a decentralized metro desk where copy from the six area bureaus and the Statehouse bureau flow through four assistant metro editors while the metro editor assigns and plans coverage with staff reporters. Flexible deadlines, depending on importance and difficulty of obtaining information, do not become rigid until the early evening in order to make the first of the zone press runs about 10:15 p.m. and the home edition press run at 12:20 a.m.

Nearly all of the News copy, almost all of it concerned with the city zone, is channeled directly to the city editor while assistants put together obit and inside city news pages. An 8:30 a.m. deadline is generally enforced for the 10 a.m. street edition run. The home edition begins to close out about 11 a.m. with only late-breaking major stories accepted as the clock nears the 12:15 final press run.

During the study period, the author clipped nearly all locally-produced news stories for later classification by length, content and number of sources cited. Each day, articles were given to the respective city or metro desk editors to evaluate in terms of time available to gather, write and edit. Each article was mailed to the major news source along with a questionnaire seeking a general evaluation of the article,

including the perception of the number and types of errors, if any. No source was sent more than one story to evaluate. The sources returned 270 articles, 54 percent of the original sample, which were then evaluated by the 47 reporters who responded via questionnaire to specific source claims of error.

Some of the major findings of prior accuracy research were that between 40 and 60 percent of all straight news stories contained mistakes, that sources considered press releases the most accurate means of communicating information to a reporter while the telephone is the least accurate, and that sources are not as likely to perceive errors in articles written by reporters they know at least casually.

This study focuses on four areas rarely examined: source familiarity with the media, reporter perception of accuracy, story characteristics that contribute to error, and organizational factors that induce—or inhibit—error.

The Sources

Mercury and News sources complained that there was something wrong with almost half the stories the reporters wrote. The reporters shrugged off most of the complaints, attributing them to source lack of objectivity. In general, the news sources considered 53 percent of the articles accurate. But they said the remaining 47 percent averaged almost 2.5 mistakes each, ranging from typographical errors to sensationalizing.

About one-third of the 246-source-perceived mistakes can be considered objective errors. Inaccurate times, dates, locations and ages each accounted for about one percent of the errors. Mathematical mistakes accounted for another five percent, and misspellings of names and typos totaled seven percent. The other 22 percent fell into a broad "other factual errors" category. Examples include reporters writing about a flea collar instead of a leather collar, writing that a robber entered with a hammer when it was a knife, and writing that a man had a steel plate in his head instead of a plastic plate.

Although they did complain of some sloppy math and factual descriptions, Mercury and News sources are really a lot like news sources in prior studies who indicate that two-thirds of their objections are to subjective errors—judgmental calls on what should go into a story, or how it should be played. They said that nearly 19 percent of the mistakes in this study were simply that the reporter omitted important information. But getting it in doesn't solve the problem either. Nine percent of the errors were things being underemphasized while another nine percent were that the facts weren't played up enough. The sources also said that 10 percent of the mistakes were misquotes. Headline errors accounted for another six percent of the error claims while the "other" category accounted for the remaining 10 percent of the 63 percent subjective error perception.

Table 1

Source Accuracy Perceptions By Exposure to Media

	Experience As News Source		
	0 to 5 Years	6 to 15 Years	16 Years Or More
	(N=82)	(N=97)	(N=61)
Saw no errors	35%	46%	61%
Saw one or more errors	65	54	39

$X^2 = 12.010$; df = 2; $p < .01$

	Number of Times Interviewed For This Story		
	Never	Once	2 Or More
"It was an accurate account"	(N=62)	(N=123)	(N=36)
Agree	65%	71%	86%
Disagree	25	12	11
Neither	20	17	3

$X^2 = 10.759$; df = 4; $p < .05$

A good predictor of whether a news source is apt to consider the news accurate is source experience with the media. Sources with more experience in dealing with reporters appear to be easier to please, more familiar with what a newspaper will publish, or maybe just more adept at making sure the message they want to get across is conveyed the way they want it. In any event, experienced news sources see fewer errors. Table 1 shows that only 39 percent of the most-experienced sources said there were mistakes in stories citing them, but 65 percent of the least-experienced sources found mistakes. And going to the source for a one-on-one interview also helps. Although 65 percent of the sources who were not personally interviewed did agree that the articles were accurate, 86 percent of those who were interviewed twice or more said the articles were accurate accounts.

The Reporters

Reporters don't think they make many mistakes—particularly the younger, less-experienced reporters—and especially errors of judgment. Reporters contend that only about 20 percent of all stories have errors and that half of them don't have as many mistakes as the sources said. In all, reporters dispute at least three-fourths of the source claims of error. But they reject 95 percent of the subjective error

claims, those errors of judgment. Examples of subjective error claims that reporters reject include a source irritated because his quotes were not published in chronological sequence, the police officer who wanted a quote left out of a story, and the college newspaper adviser who objected to distorted language—the word liquor in the story and headline—after his paper was granted the right to run beer and wine ads.

Reporters are more likely to admit they made objective than subjective errors. In fact, Table 2 shows that they admit to source claims of objective errors just a little less than half the time. Basically, they are agreeing with sources like the one who said his name was Tim, not Tom, and the assistant state attorney general who objected to three zeroes being lopped off a $25,000,000 loss estimate.

Older and more experienced journalists tend to be more tolerant and are better able to see the source point of view. In any case, they are generally more willing to concede they may have erred than are their younger, less-experienced colleagues. Reporters over 35 and those who have been in journalism more than 10 years think that the source may be right nearly half the time. But their younger, less-experienced colleagues are pretty adamant that they did not make a mistake. They only agree with the source about 15 percent of the time, according to Table 2.

Table 2

Agreement With Source Claims of Error

Type of Error	Number of Errors	Reporters Who Agree	Reporters Who Disagree
Objective	(84)	46%	54%
Subjective	(116)	5	95
		$X^2 = 46.440$; df = 1; $p < .001$	
Reporter's Age			
35 or younger	(109)	14%	86%
36 or older	(91)	40	60
		$X^2 = 17.995$; df = 1; $p < .001$	
Number of Years In Journalism			
Under 10 years	(89)	16%	84%
10 years or more	(111)	33	67
		$X^2 = 8.625$; df = 1; $p < .01$	
Number of Newspapers Worked For			
One or two	(59)	47%	53%
Three or more	(141)	16	84
		$X^2 = 21.443$; df = 1; $p < .001$	

Table 3

Source-Perceived Errors by Story Characteristics and Deadlines

Content	Number of Stories	Percent Sources Say Contain No Errors	Percent Sources Say Contain One or more Errors	
General News	(75)	37%	63%	$X^2 = 14.544$
Local Government News	(71)	42	58	df = 3
Crime & Court News	(53)	60	40	$p < .01$
Special Beat News	(47)	68	32	
Story Length				
Under 10 inches	(75)	60%	40%	$X^2 = 6.607$
10 through 19 inches	(127)	47	53	df = 2
20 inches or more	(46)	37	63	$p < .05$
Number of Sources Cited				
Only one source	(103)	58%	42%	$X^2 = 6.684$
Two or more sources	(147)	42	58	df = 1
				$p < .01$
Time to Write Before Deadline				
Less than 45 minutes	(44)	66%	34%	$X^2 = 5.950$
45 minutes or more	(54)	41	59	df = 1
				$p < .05$

It isn't because older, more experienced reporters make more mistakes either. The sources saw about the same percentage of error—about one in every other story—whether the reporter was under 35 or older, had been in journalism one year of 20 years, or worked on only one newspaper or worked on five. And it doesn't appear that one group covers more complicated stories than other reporters. The type of story, its length and the number of sources cited did not vary from one reporter group to another.

Story Characteristics

The way a news story is put together, and what it is about, definitely has an effect on error rates, or at least on the perception of error. In general, Table 3 shows that news sources were much more likely to claim there were mistakes in an article if the story was about local government or general news, the longer the story ran, and if the reporter also obtained some of the information from other sources.

Only about one-third of the special beat assignments—primarily science, environment, education, labor and transportation—were seen as containing some inaccuracies, while about 40 percent of the police and court beat items were said to have mistakes in them. In comparison, the error rate is much higher for local government and general news—58 and 63 percent, respectively. Recall the earlier finding that the more experience a person has as a news source, the less likely errors will be perceived. Police, attorneys, judges and such specialists as labor negotiators, educators and transit specialists, tend to remain stable in their positions over a period of time, thus increasing the amount of time and experience they have in dealing with the media. However, some of the city council positions change every few years and consequently council members, like individuals interviewed because of one-time events, tend to have less experience in dealing with the media.

Less surprising are the findings that sources are more likely to see errors in stories that are longer and stories that contain information obtained from other sources. Although only 37 percent of the articles over 20 inches were said to be error-free, as compared with 60 percent of the short stories, it is the longer story that can contain more facts for possible error. Similarly, the finding that perceived error increases from 42 percent of the one-source stories to 58 percent of the multi-source stories is also to be expected. Given the fact that such information is probably not identical to that supplied by the source, the chances that it will be perceived as inaccurate rise.

Deadlines

Because journalism is, as the cliche goes, history in a hurry, the element of time is undoubtedly one of the major constraints in shaping the news. Most morning newspapers can delay news deadlines until early evening and still make delivery to the door before the reader wakes up. But afternoon newspapers find that midday is about as late as they dare wait in order to be at the door before the evening news comes on television.

These differences in deadline pressures are quite evident at the morning Mercury and the afternoon News. About 28 percent of the Mercury stories are not due on the day of assignment. An even larger proportion of News items, 41 percent, plus about 48 percent of bureau articles also are due later. Bureau stories are largely self-assigned and the reporters are constantly planning ahead. Many of the News articles are not due since once the midday deadline is met, reporters can relax a little and work on features, indepth accounts or even routine news that doesn't need to be at the desk until the following morning. But Table 4 shows that there is quite a difference in the amount of time the Mercury, News and bureau reporters have to gather and write their stories when they are working on that day's newspaper. (Table 4 excludes pool reporters because their working conditions tend to be a mixture of the other three.) Less that one-fifth of the Mercury assignments are due within two hours, as compared with 29 percent of the bureau stories and more than 70 percent of the News articles. Similarly, nearly 90 percent of the News items must be written within one hour, but less than half of the bureau stories and only 16 percent of the Merucry items are written that rapidly. And although 93 percent of the items coming across the desk at the News must be edited within 15 minutes, only 10 percent of the copy at the Mercury must be processed that fast.

Surprisingly, there is a negative relationship between deadlines and error. The time the reporter has to write and whether an error will be seen by the source is the reverse of what might be expected. As the amount of time available to write the story before deadline decreases, Table 3 shows that the chances of making an error also decreases. Nearly two-thirds of the articles written in 30 minutes or less did not contain any mistakes, according to the sources. Conversely, only 41 percent of those taking longer to write were considered error-free. There was no apparent effect on perceived error, either way, by how long the reporter knew of the assignment of how long the city and metro editors had to edit the copy.

Impact of Deadlines

If increasing time pressure reduces the likelihood of error, the question of "how" must focus on whether deadlines affect other organizational constraints. Newsroom observation indicates the speed required to produce for the afternoon newspaper

Table 4

Comparisons of Stories by Three Groups of Reporters

	Morning Mercury Reporters	Afternoon News Reporters	Bureau Reporters	
	(N=54)	(N=69)	(N=75)	
Percent of Copy Due				
Within two hours of assignment	17%	72%	29%	$X^2 = 46.507$
Two hours or more after assignment	83	28	61	df = 2
				$p < .001$
	(N=81)	(N=113)	(N=165)	
Percent of Copy Written				
Less than one hour before deadline	16%	89%	45%	$X^2 = 108.263$
One hour or more before deadline	84	11	55	df = 2
				$p < .001$
	(N=88)	(N=82)	(N=155)	
Percent of Copy on Desk				
15 minutes or less for editing	6%	93%	10%	$X^2 = 209.018$
16 minutes or more for editing	94	7	90	df = 2
				$p < .001$
	(N=64)	(N=41)	(N=83)	
Content				
General News	33%	30%	22%	$X^2 = 21.896$
Local Government News	28	10	42	df = 6
Police & Court News	24	24	7	$p < .005$
Special Beat News	15	36	29	
Story Length				
Under 10 inches	25%	32%	26%	$X^2 = 12.958$
10 through 19 inches	59	32	58	df = 4
20 inches or longer	16	37	16	$p < .05$
Number of Sources Cited				
One source	41%	53%	39%	$X^2 = 5.402$
Two sources	16	20	26	df = 4
Three or more sources	43	27	35	p: n.s.

affects the relationships among reporters. Deadlines at the News appear to produce teamwork, cooperative rather than competitive relationships among reporters. Lack of time forces the reporters to share information and sources which often results in team-produced breaking news stories that are the product of many reporters. Such haste might easily cause error, but the overlapping of information gathered by several reporters usually produces complementary information and some repetition of facts.

Deadlines also affect the news-gathering techniques. This is important given prior research findings that sources consider press releases the most accurate means of conveying information to a reporter and the telephone the worst. Reporters in all four groups spend a comparable amount of their day on the telephone, between 30 and 40 percent. However, News reporters spend a greater amount of their time, 26 percent, doing rewrites, as compared with about 10 percent or less for the other reporters.

Just as important is the fact that midday deadlines largely determine the kind of things reporters write about. Three things all happen about 10 a.m. The news conference dictates the play of the news for the home edition. Local government begins to move into high gear for the day. Pool and bureau reporters file their budgets for the stories they will be writing that day. As a result, the News originates significantly less governmental coverage. Proportionately, the News produces only a third as much as the Mercury and only a fourth that of the bureaus. However, the News does produce more than twice as much special beat news as does the Mercury.

It would be expected that because of deadline pressures, the News would not write stories as lengthy

as the Mercury and the bureaus would not have the time to contact as many sources. However, the results in Table 4 are that, although there is a tendency for News reporters to use fewer sources, they also write longer stories. More than half of the News articles cited only one source as compared with about 40 percent on the items written by Mercury and bureau reporters. Only 16 percent of Mercury and bureau articles were 20 inches or longer, but 37 percent of the News items were. This may be because after the noon deadline, News reporters are free to work on features and special beat news for the next day's newspaper which, because of added color and more detailed information, tend to be longer than straight news.

Reporting under time pressure does not result in fewer errors because speed improves accuracy, but because deadlines limit capability. It is the reduction of certain content plus pressure-induced news-gathering techniques that minimize error. Thus, the error rate of the News does not differ greatly from the other reporter groups. The percentage for all is comparable to the amount of copy each produced. Mercury reporters wrote 23 percent of the articles evaluated by the sources who said they contained 24 percent of all the mistakes. The other groups were: bureau reporters, 44 percent of the items and 46 percent of the errors; pool reporters, 15 and 17 percent, respectively; and News reporters, slightly more difference at 18 and 13 percent, respectively.

Circulation

If time is the principal reason why the News originates little routine governmental coverage and why it publishes only about one-fourth of the pool copy and about five percent of the bureau stories before the Mercury does, the lack of circulation gives added incentive to ignore all but the major events in those areas. Only about 4.5 percent of the News circulation is in the North County bureau area. And it has less than 1,700 subscribers in the areas covered by the other five bureaus. By contrast, 7.6 percent of the Mercury circulation is in the North County while another 14 percent, 21,806 circulation, is in the rest of the bureau area. Because the Mercury will publish most relevant bureau and pool items and because the Mercury is a sister publication in the same newsroom makes it easy for the News to let the bulk of this coverage go first to the Mercury, knowing it can pick and choose interesting items on the next publishing cycle.

Summary and Implications

The joint operation and ownership of the San Jose Mercury and the San Jose News essentially establishes a round-the-clock newspaper with morning and afternoon editions. This allows the afternoon newspaper to ignore news events that do not coincide with its fast-paced information-processing system. Thus, while it is enlightening to isolate news by reporter groups in order to examine particular effects, separate analysis may be misleading because any item produced for one newspaper will generally also be published in the other, verbatim and with the reporter's byline.

Scrutiny of the separate organizational structures is particularly beneficial because of how information processing is shaped by environmental and organizational constraints. The Mercury's larger circulation area forces it into a decentralized operation relying on staff, bureau and pool reporters to cover, mostly under their own supervision, numerous communities and counties in a combination metro-agricultural area more than 100 miles long. The relative lack of time pressure—many articles are still only in the gathering stages at the time of the Mercury's 3 p.m. news conference—enables the Mercury to operate in this looser fashion and still bring everything together by the early evening deadlines. However, even if the lack of circulation in most of the surrounding area was not a sufficient reason for the News to ignore routine events there, the pressure of deadline requires that they be excluded. The time pressure requires that the News operate coordinated, and often joint, news-gathering routines.

It appears from this analysis that these deadline-caused procedures actually minimize the chances of making mistakes by restricting the conditions which create error, the story characteristics, the information-gathering techniques and even the sources the reporters deal with. Primarily because of deadlines, News reporters originate less error-prone governmental news but more relatively error-free special beat news. The News writes longer stories, which contain more error, but this is offset because a larger proportion of News copy is the special beat items and because News contacts probably have more experience as news sources and consequently perceive fewer mistakes. In addition, the News also spends more time on rewrites of press releases and other items which also reduce the chance of making errors.

News sources claim almost half the news contains mistakes. Even reporters admit that 20 percent of the items have errors. Who is right is largely irrelevant. If the source considers something wrong, the problem for newspapers is to find ways to alter the perception regardless of its accuracy. Besides preventing mistakes, newspapers need to minimize conditions which generate the suspicion that something is wrong with a story. Since the perception of error varies with the characteristics of the story and the experience of the source, but not with that of the reporter, error perception may be a situational factor, a function of source expectation.

This study suggests at least three techniques that may be used by reporters to minimize source suspicions:

1. Since the bulk of source objections include such areas as omissions and distortions, closing the interview with such questions as "Have I left anything out?" or "What else do you think is important?" might elicit useful information and prevent source irritation.

2. Seek source reaction to other source information, especially if it is controversial or contradictory. Multiple sources may not always lead to complexity of issues, but they appear to breed diversity of opinion and lead to disagreement. Ensuring that major sources are familiar with other points of view to be presented in the story should at least shift any perception of inaccuracy from the newspaper to the other source.

3. Make certain that individuals who are not usually news sources have a better understanding of what the newspaper is going to do with the information. These sources apparently are not as familiar with the news conventions of what will be included or omitted and how the information will be restructured for publication.

Undoubtedly many other techniques can be cited for reducing error and the perception of it. The important point is to prevent misunderstandings between news sources and reporters. Not doing so may be the biggest mistake. □

Editor's Note

For a broad overview of newspaper accuracy and related research, see Michael Singeltary's "Accuracy in News Reporting: A Review of the Research," ANPA News Research Report No. 25, Jan. 25, 1980. Prior news source accuracy studies include, in chronological order: Mitchell V. Charnley, "Preliminary Notes on a Study of Newspaper Accuracy," Journalism Quarterly, 13:394-401 (1936); Charles H. Brown, "Majority of Readers Give Papers an A for Accuracy," Editor & Publisher, Feb. 13, 1965; Fred C. Berry Jr., "A Study of Accuracy in Local News Stories of Three Dailies," Journalism Quarterly, 44:482-90 (1967); Gary C. Lawrence and David L. Grey, "Subjective Inaccuracies in Local News Reporting," Journalism Quarterly, 46:753-57 (1969); William C. Blankenburg, "News Accuracy: Some Findings on the Meaning of Errors," Journal of Communication, 20:375-86 (1970); and Hal Marshall, "Newspaper Accuracy in Tucson," Journalism Quarterly, 54:165-68 (1977).

American Newspaper Publishers Association

ANPA

TO ADVANCE THE CAUSE OF A FREE PRESS